Ha! Ha!
Among the Trumpets

Ha! Ha!

Among the Trumpets

Sermons by

Martin H. Franzmann

CPH™
ST. LOUIS

Copyright © 1966, 1994 Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
Manufactured in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 66-15516

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 02 01 00 99 98 97 96 95 94

Preface

The trumpet seems far too demonstrative an instrument to delight the likes of Martin Franzmann. He was a quiet, gentle man, not a brassy creature at all. Yet his writing is lively, as brilliant to the reader as any trumpet is to the hearer. Yes, he like trumpets, especially God's trumpet, "A trumpet none could silence or mistake."

With this reprint of Dr. Franzmann's book of sermons, a new audience, and perhaps some of the old who missed it the first time around, will have the opportunity to catch the fresh air of his clear proclamation of God's Word, a preaching that, it seems, time will not easily "silence or mistake."

For just over a year I joined the staff and students at Westfield House, Cambridge, for the weekly Pericope Seminar when Martin Franzmann conducted it. Here one could see the exegete-preacher at work, preparing for the weekly proclamation of the Word in its liturgical setting of the Divine Service. "The purpose of this seminar," he said by way of introduction, "is worship."

The seminar was memorable for many reasons. For some it was above all learning to ask the right questions of the text. That was the beginning of effective and faithful proclamation. "Never," he instructed, "allow the words 'OF COURSE' be used." That was how he confronted the danger of familiarity with the text. Memorable for us all were the regular "one-liners" of wisdom.

ON TEXTUAL PREACHING: "Without a text, you feel like Adam without your fig leaves."

Or who would forget the lecture on homiletics that featured the schoolboy's "spitball."

ON PREACHING AS A "SPITBALL": "First take a piece of paper. Masticate it. Then aim it—behind the ear. Sometimes a spitball is shot at the ceiling; that is not the kind we want."

ON GRIMNESS IN PREACHING: "There is a tendency today for preachers to feel that a joyful preaching is shallow. It must be existentially grim. Don't keep such a cold stove that the cats won't come to eat. It must have doxology. When you stop having doxology, you're not preaching."

ON PULPIT ORATORY: "What keeps a man from being a pulpit orator is being a pastor."

SERMON, SERMONETTE, OR WHAT? "Call a sermon a 'sermon'; don't avoid that and call it a 'meditation' or 'sermonette' or even 'brief sermon.' DARE TO SAY: 'I'm going to preach to you!'"

About his delivery one would not use that questionable expression that he "preached with power." The real power, he would prefer to say "authority," of his words was in their substance, not in their style; he trusted that they were God's words. There was in him no "tired elegance" nor "neurotic pulpit eloquence" (see his own Preface to the first edition). 'Yet, how can one overlook his style. For even his spoken words were based on that skill that he had mastered better than most—a mastery of the written word. "Write a lot," he encouraged. Then he would quote a German saying, "Write till you are free."

Even his titles are exceptional. Certainly the last one in this collection is brilliant. Here Franzmann retells the story,

homily style as he called it, with the refrain, "And what happens then?" (See also the earlier use of the refrain, "The disciples failed." pp. 41ff.)

For those readers who are preachers another bit of Dr. Franzmann's advice would be appropriate: "In reading sermons (of other men), don't read any which you can imitate directly. God has placed you in that pulpit for that time, not to imitate a Mr. Big Preacher." Yet the wise preacher can still learn from this servant of the Word who would often twist the phrase "understand the Scripture" to say, "one must stand under the Word."

The quality of writing shows when its effectiveness endures; Franzmann's delivery of the message is as fresh today as ever. What could be more relevant for today than his warning about *Ersatz* hymnody (p. 95), more pointed than his identification of the "lurking paganism" in us (p. 87)? Where could one hear clearer gospel than the description of a battle won (p. 18) or of "the man who went home with only a word in his pocket" (pp. 104 ff.)? Every sermon ends on a note of "high doxology" in the declaration of the forgiving love of our Lord.

Ronald Feuerhahn

Contents

1. **HA! HA! AMONG THE TRUMPETS** *(Seminary Graduation)* 3
2. **VISION FOR COMBAT** 13
3. **FEAR BORN OF FORGIVENESS** *(Advent)* 20
4. **HE SHALL BE GREAT** *(Advent)* 25
5. **IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT** *(Epiphany)* 31
6. **THE DISCIPLES' CONFESSION** *(Lent)* 36
7. **THE YOUNG MAN WHO FLED** *(Lent)* 46
8. **THE ROYAL BANNERS FORWARD GO** *(Lent)* 51
9. **THE BEATING HEART OF ALL OUR HOPE** *(Easter)* 64
10. **THE WAITING BRIDE OF CHRIST** *(Pentecost)* 71
11. **POOR IN SPIRIT** *(Installation of a Theologian)* 77
12. **THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER** *(Thanksgiving)* 86
13. **THEOLOGY MUST SING** *(Reformation)* 92
14. **FOLLOW ME** *(Beginning of School Year)* 98
15. **THE MAN WHO WENT HOME WITH ONLY A WORD IN HIS POCKET** 104

1

HA! HA! AMONG THE TRUMPETS

(Seminary Graduation)

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.
1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

Nowhere in that jubilant and exuberant book, the Old Testament, is there such an expression of joyful wonder at the creation of God as in the latter chapters of the Book of Job. They are, as it were, an echo of God's own "Very good!" — a reflection of the delight and love with which God Himself embraces and sustains His handiwork (A. Weiser). And in all these chapters, in all these pictures of beings fearfully and wonderfully made, there is none quite like the picture of the horse in his strength (39:19-25), the horse whose neck is clothed with thunder, the glory of whose nostrils is terrible, who paweth in the valley and rejoiceth in his strength, who mocketh at fear, who swalloweth the ground with fear and rage — "He saith among the trumpets, 'Ha! Ha!' "

God has made him a horse, a steed of war. He delights in being a horse; he is glad to work like a horse and to fight like a steed of war. He hears the trumpets of war, and he

cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet; that trumpet is God's call to him to be what God has made him. And he greets that call with an equine Alleluia! He snuffs the air, and stamps the ground, and "saith among the trumpets, 'Ha! Ha!' "

Summoning us to such an Alleluia to God, who has shined out of darkness and created us anew in Christ Jesus, St. Paul bids us: "Rejoice evermore." He is bidding us enter with gusto, exuberance, and vigor upon the work that God has created us for, upon the works He Himself has before prepared that we should walk in them. The apostle is calling us to enter gladly, vigorously, and resolutely upon our ministry; he is calling us to a glad and resolute Ha! Ha! among the trumpets.

St. Paul is not summoning us to any easy, smiling optimism, to any easy and shallow exposure of our teeth. He is calling us to give heed to that which triumphs over death and gives us the victory. He is calling us to give ear to the trumpet call of God and to cry Ha! Ha! among the trumpets.

I. The Trumpets of God: "Rejoice evermore . . . for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

The trumpet of God has sounded — one long, sonorous arabesque of sound which broke upon the midnight air when the angels brought good tidings of great joy to shepherds, and all the hosts of heaven made melody when the glory of the Lord shone round about them, a trumpet call that rose with a swell and a surge as of the sound of many waters to rend the veil of the temple and to shake the earth to open all men's graves, when our Lord was crucified and rose again. And that trumpet call is for *us:* "This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning *you.*" This trumpet call bids you snuff that Easter air, that air from which our Lord, upon the cross,

has swept away all the dank and poisonous vapors of sin, all the miasma of mortality; it bids you scent that eternal air, and stamp that Easter-cloven ground, and to stand in triumph on your graves, and to cry Ha! Ha!

That blast reverberates through all the valleys of time and place, and all the trumpet calls that we shall hear in all our ministry are but echoes and repercussions of that one triumphant blast. We shall hear the trumpets of God. We shall hear the cutting rigor of the stern and deep-throated trumpet call to repentance: "Draw near to God, for He has drawn near to you! Turn ye, turn ye — turn from yourselves, and your sin, and your contorted revolt against your God. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near!" And with it, at once, we shall hear the melody of mercy, the silver solace of the trumpet of the forgiveness of our God, that trumpet which breathes the cross and tells us, "It is finished," and spells out for us with every silver tone, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Greet that trumpet in both its tones with resolute rejoicing. Say Ha! Ha! among these trumpets of God.

And with the sounding of these trumpets there is released also the eternal music, brave and resonant and pure, of love, the love which never faileth. It is the love of God that does not find but creates the object of its love — that love at work upon us, in us, and through us, to make our ministry a ministry like His who came to minister and give His life a ransom for many. Greet that trumpet call with a reckless self-giving love that rejoices to spend and be spent, and thus speak your Ha! Ha! to that trumpet of God.

You are entering the *Christian* ministry, and you shall hear the clear, succinct, and doubtless staccato call to confession: "Whosoever will confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Our Lord Him-

self has promised us the Holy Spirit to enable us to answer this call, to say Ha! Ha! to this trumpet even though it may mean danger, even though it may mean death. And this Holy Spirit will enable us to do what *we* can never do: to confess the *truth.*

This Spirit of our God will give us ears to hear another trumpet tone: the pure and valid tones of the simplicity of truth, amid the whine and chatter of half-truths, twisted truths, and lies. We must greet that trumpet too with a brave Ha! Ha! And who is sufficient for that? But there is still another trumpet, resounding sonorous tones of strength: "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God." And with that trumpet tone in our ears we know that we can resist the devil, and he will flee from us. One little word — "Jesus is Lord!" — can fell him; he will flee from us. You are to be confessing ministers: "We believe, teach, and confess!" Give ear to the marching beat of this trumpet of the power of the mastery of God's own might, and greet it with a bold Ha! Ha!

Our Lutheran confessors made their confession in the consciousness that they must all appear before the judgment throne of Christ; and we must all confess with the end in view, for confession is always an eschatological act. And so it is given to us to hear also the long crescendo of the horns of hope. And this hope is not merely wistful longing and sighing for what we have not; it is a strong and confident taking refuge in God and holding fast in Him. And so we hear along with the horns of hope the strong sostenuto of the trumpets of patience, of endurance, of steadfastness. And our Ha! Ha! to that means this: "To strain towards that which is hidden as toward that which is to come, and to bear manfully the pressure of the present." (Althaus)

And we do not hope gropingly or blindly; with the trum-

pet of patience and with the horn of hope there come also the rolling tones of the horns of revelation. We are given eyes of the heart enlightened to know what is the hope of our calling, what are the riches of the glory of the inheritance which God has provided for us. And thus the fanfare and the flourishes of the trumpets of eternity are ringing in our ears, even here and now: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven." Oh, snuff the air of that eternal dawn, and stamp that conquered ground, that earth where God's will shall be perfectly done as it is done in heaven! Oh, snuff that air, and stamp that ground, and greet these horns with a brave Ha! Ha! "The God of hope fill you with all joy in believing."

These are the makings of your ministry. Perhaps you have decided to work like a horse in your ministry. Do so by all means. But do not work like a drudging nag under the lash, or a weary bag of bones under the yoke. We are not under the yoke in our ministry. The necessity which is laid upon us is not that of the yoke and the lash but that of the irresistible call of God's own trumpet. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning your ministry.

II. *The Blasts of Satan: "Pray Without Ceasing."*

In the same breath with his command to rejoice, St. Paul bids us pray without ceasing, and he has good reason to do so. For Satan has his trumpet too. The trumpet of Satan can really sound only retreat and defeat: "Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out," our Lord said as He went to the cross. And the cross is an accomplished and triumphant fact. Satan has lost his right and place as the accuser of mankind; he can no longer stand before the throne of God and accuse us and our brethren day and night. He is cast out of the judgment hall, but he still has a great fury and formidable might — and deep

7

THE YOUNG MAN WHO FLED

(Lent)

And there followed Him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body, and the young men laid hold on him. And he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.
MARK 14:51, 52

Some have supposed, and it is a very plausible supposition, that the young man mentioned in these verses is St. Mark the Evangelist himself; that St. Mark is here putting his signature to his gospel. If that is so, St. Mark is recording his own shame, and he is not the only inspired writer to do so. The early church has preserved for us the tradition that the Gospel According to St. Mark is the record of the preaching of St. Peter, who in his preaching obviously did not spare himself. The Gospel that reflects his preaching is as unsparing as any in its portrayal of his weaknesses, his misunderstandings, and his denial; in fact it omits some things creditable to St. Peter which St. Matthew records. St. Paul himself, too, tells us that he persecuted the church, and does so that he may glorify the grace of his Lord the more. St. Mark, then, belongs to that goodly fellowship who sought not their own glory but Another's, who had lost themselves in the wonder

of the forgiving love of the God who had met them in Jesus, who is the Christ. What they write is not of themselves or for themselves. It is written for our learning.

The young man who fled learned something important that night on which, whether from youthful curiosity or whatever motive, he followed Jesus and His disciples from afar when they left the Upper Room for the Garden of Gethsemane. He wanted to look on, to see what would happen. He learned that you cannot be a spectator of the Lord Jesus Christ; you cannot follow from a distance and look on. You are involved one way or another as soon as you confront Him.

He had learned the lesson, partly at least. The full lesson did not come easy, not even for the men whom we now call Saints with a capital "S." The young man, John Mark, had promise. St. Paul took him along on the missionary journey, the first one, that was to carry him through Cyprus and into Asia Minor. St. Mark did well enough on Cyprus apparently, amid the familiar pattern of his Jewish life, in the preaching in the synagog of the Diaspora. But on the starkly Gentile coasts of Asia Minor his courage failed him once more, and again he sought to follow his Lord from afar, as a spectator, from his mother's house in Jerusalem. When Barnabas wished to take him along on the second missionary journey, St. Paul objected so violently that he and Barnabas quarreled and separated. Barnabas took his cousin Mark and went once more to Cyprus. We lose sight of him for some years after that. Somewhere in those years he learned those lessons fully. When next we hear of him, he is a fellow worker and a comfort to that fighter of the good fight, St. Paul, who bespeaks a welcome for him from the good people of Colossae. And when, again some years later, St. Paul summons Timothy to Rome that he may see him before he dies, he bids Timothy bring Mark with him and pays him the good

workman's tribute: "For he is profitable to me for the ministry." The Christian who could thus confidently be summoned to Rome to be present at the execution of a Christian, not without risk to himself, had ceased to be a spectator and had become a witness. Except for an affectionate word from St. Peter we know nothing more of him. Later tradition has it that he made a good end and witnessed with his blood to the Lord, whose life he found the grace to pen.

The Lord Jesus Christ wants no spectators; St. Mark has taught us this in these two verses. We learn it everywhere in Scripture. Zacchaeus, who "sought to see Jesus who He was," was not allowed to remain in this spectator's perch in the sycamore tree. Jesus confronted him, and confronted him with a decision: "Make haste and come down, for today I must abide at thy house." The Lord Jesus Christ tolerates no spectators. You are either for Him, or you are against Him. He not only hung on the cross in space between two malefactors; He drew a sharp furrow of life and death between them. The one reviled Him; the other said, "Remember Thou me!"

This lesson comes hard to our comfortable Christianity. We six-to-the-padded-pew disiciples have blurred the line of the either-or; we grow uneasy at the fact, the completely obvious fact, that if we are involved with Jesus Christ at all, we are totally involved. "With the *heart* man believeth," and "heart" in Biblical language is the whole man — his mind, his feelings, his will, and all that is within him. If some cynical joker, disgusted at our parochial squabbling, were to write over the church door, "Fighting Room Only," he would be telling the sober truth albeit unconsciously. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ does not mean only that we have become acquainted with a "catechismful" of facts about Him; it means that we have been drawn into the live momentum

11

POOR IN SPIRIT

(Installation of Professor of Old Testament Interpretation)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
MATTHEW 5:3

You are this afternoon being installed in the office to which you have been duly called, that of professor of theology. In such a solemn moment as this it behooves us all to bethink ourselves and to consider what the basic fact of being a theologian is, for every man that professes Christianity is a theologian in the ancient and honorable, the original, sense of that word. He is a herald and proclaimer of the God in whom he believes. And for the true theologian, the theologian of the theology of the cross, the first Beatitude is a text to cast light upon the nature and the work of such a theologian of the cross.

Now, every theologian has before him two choices. Either he can cast a critical and selective eye upon God's revelation of Himself, upon Scripture, and according to his own preferences and predilections make his God of whatever elements in that revelation seem to him essential and "of abiding value." He can reject, select, trim, splice, plane, and smoothe

according to his bent and bias and build himself a comfortable, medium-size deity with whom he can stand pretty well shoulder to shoulder, a god who will not dwarf him overmuch, a god who can reasonably be expected even to feel flattered that someone believes in him. If a man chooses to be a theologian of that sort, he can still loom quite magnificently against the sky in the full stature of the autonomous man as man would naturally like to be. He can live out his days in a kind of bland and self-sufficient security. To be sure, the great and persistent question of "the valley of the shadow of death," that inescapable mote to trouble the mind's eye, will remain unanswered. But what of that? Is not our brave, clever little man a theologian? Does he not write books? And do not people read and review them and find them — bless the mark — "stimulating and suggestive" in the freedom of the mind with which he unprepossessedly and insouciantly surveys and measures the sanctuary of his god? Our little theologian will read other theologians' books too, and from time to time he will find it necessary to "modify his position," perhaps quite radically. But he will never need to repent. For is not his god his to do with as he pleases? — For in the beginning was our little man, and he said: "Let there be a god!"

Or the theologian can make the choice that you, my dear brother, long ago have made. He can accept the God who has revealed Himself in all the uncompromised splendor, all the uncomfortable greatness of His Deity. He can accept, even though he cannot face, the terrible exalted holiness before which the seraphim veil their faces. He can accept the sublimity and the illimitable power that make man ask, "What is man that Thou are mindful of him?" He can accept His eternity, the "I am that I am," the one fixed point that will not flow with the flux of our changing thought or

change with our mutable existence, that absoluteness that by an awesome paradox we both hotly desire and fiercely reject in the thinking of our flesh. He can accept the inscrutable wisdom that makes Him, in the course of this world and its history, the God that hideth Himself. But also he can and does accept with the inexorable hold of despair, with the clutch of a Spirit-wrought faith, the God of Israel, who came down, and drew nigh, and revealed Himself to men, and chose man, and loved him, and redeemed him — the God of Israel, the Savior. He can and does accept the measureless and immeasurable grace of the revealed God, the love past all searching out, the love of God that will not let him go.

Once that choice is made, once that complete reversal of mind and heart and will has taken place, then man, the true theologian, has become what our Lord here calls him — poor in spirit.

Poor in Spirit

To be poor in spirit is something more basic than the virtue of humility. It means being a beggar before God. It means giving up once and for all any attempt on man's part to ascend to God, on moral ladders of merit, on mystical ladders of contemplation, or on intellectual ladders of speculation, or on any ladders whatsoever. It is to see steadily and clearly our own nothingness and the *allness* of God. To see that God comes to us, that we do not in any sense or by any method rise up to Him. It means living our life in terms of the second person singular, God — "Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us" — and not in the first person singular of man ("I thank thee, God, that I am not as other men").

Being poor in spirit means, first, that we see God as the God whose wrath is revealed from heaven on *all* ungodliness (even on the idolatry that gives the subtle glory of being

"humble" to man) and on all unrighteousness, as the God who in the inevitability of His holiness reacts to punish and to destroy all that is not holy and that is not good. But that is the beginning, not the end of being poor in spirit.

We see Him as the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, who dwells in the high and holy place, but we see Him also as the God who dwells with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. We see Him as the God of love, of that impossible, lost love that gave His only Son, His beloved Son for us, that we might find Him and have Him as the God that justifieth the ungodly; that we, who look upon ourselves in hopeless despair, might against hope believe in hope and stagger not at the promises of God. It means that we see Him, know Him, and adore Him as the God that hath chosen the foolish things of the world, the weak things, the base things, the things that are despised, yea, the things which are not — us — to bring to naught the things that are. We look back to His old revelation of Himself, and we see that He was from the beginning thus: He set His love upon Israel and chose Israel, not because they were more in number than any people; no, for they were the fewest of all people. We see Him as the God who deliberately took from Gideon thousands upon thousands of men, trimmed his forces from a mighty 32,000, a jagged rock of manpower to bash out adversaries' brains. He trimmed it down to a pitiful 300, a cinder to make an adversary's eye smart, no more, that He might say, "Arise, get thee down unto the host, for I have delivered it unto thine hand," that no flesh might glory before Him.

We come before Him with nothing in our hand, with nothing in ourselves — we bring our need before Him. We know that it is the God who commanded the light to shine out of